

## "NAUGHTY ANIMAL"—A DISCIPLINE CHATS BACK<sup>1</sup>

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"WHY", runs an old riddle, "do little birds in a nest agree?" Answer—"Because otherwise they would fall out". Death by "fall out". Whichever way you take it, it is the case for coexistence in a nutshell.

Coexistence: not in nests only is it needed, but in boats. "Sooner or later, unless the nations find somehow the secret of keeping her nicely trimmed, the lifeboat of what we still call civilization must go down". It was on an affirmation of confidence in the complicity of all who shared with him this conviction that the writer ended his inaugural lecture<sup>2</sup> on appointment to his London Chair. It was, he has been coming to see, the confidence of youth. Now that it is later, by 25 years, whatever may have become of the confidence, the conviction is unimpaired. What always was truth has ripened into truism. Coexistence is becoming a hackneyed theme.

To coexist. But how? That was, and is, the problem. Hence the study, and the need for study, of the conditions of social living at the relevant level, which is, of course, the diplomatic level. Hence, that is, the study of International Relations. Hence, in the writer's case, his aforesaid lecture. And now, it is later, by 25 years.

One might have supposed that it would by this time no longer be needed of anyone that he canvass the character of International Relations as a subject in itself. Yet even today there are indications that it may be as necessary as ever. For example, paragraph one of *The Economist's* review of Professor Renouvin's account of the history of international relations in the nineteenth century:

"A good deal has been talked in this country recently about the claim of 'international relations' to be an independent academic discipline; some have even gone so far as to envisage a body of theory applicable to relations between separate political communities in abstraction. Like most other attempts to apply the inappropriate methods of the natural sciences to the complexities of human behaviour it is more than doubtful whether any real advance in knowledge or understanding is possible along these lines. . . . This splendid synthesis . . . provides abundant testimony to the belief that history properly conceived is the only method by which human society can be studied and that the rôle of the so-called social sciences, including the *soi-disant* science of international relations, is to act as ancillaries to historical scholarship".<sup>3</sup>

This, for a subject such as International Relations, is doubtless what is meant by having a bad press. Of the author of a work on Social Psychology it was lately remarked that he was not one of those social scientists who were so busy publicising the importance of their study that they had no time left over for pursuing it themselves. Happy man. No need, it would seem, in his case, for that. Whereas, if the teachers of International Relations should be suffering self-reproach, it is rather because, so

<sup>1</sup> "Cet animal est très méchant: quand on l'attaque, il se défend".

<sup>2</sup> The month was October 1930.

<sup>3</sup> *The Economist*, August 27th, 1955.

immersed have they been in their vast and absorbing subject that they have too little borne in mind their responsibility for making its nature known, and for combating at their birth those inexactitudes about it which, whether with good or evil intent, can come to be given acceptance by those in whose hands it may lie to hamstring its development. This ought they to have done, and not left the other undone.

As to *The Economist's* review, an amateur of history, with a regard for the professionals, must be excused for hoping that it will not have been the work of one of them. One sentence reads: "Painters learn to paint by painting; international relations can only be studied in action; and since it is given to few of us to be a Bismarck or even a Delcassé, we have to make do with history". Would it sound so very much more lackadaisical to say: "Actors learn to act by acting; acting can only be studied as done on the stage; and since it is given to few of us to be Trees or Irvings, we have to be content with going to the pictures"? The sombre thing is that such a paragraph, submitted at the expense of a subject not strongly established or widely understood, is printed in a journal ordinarily of such unimpeachable discernment.

It is for all that an effective passage—as much by the truths as by the half-truths it contains. That the social sciences can indeed "act as ancillaries to historical scholarship" is a notable finding. But how is it to be squared with the earlier attribution to them of "inappropriate methods" such as are unlikely to make possible "any real advance in knowledge or understanding"? And if, as also seems implied, the value of International Relations as an ancillary to something else is conclusive against its ranking as an independent discipline, what disciplines can with validity claim independence in the relevant sense? Mathematics? Statistics? Chemistry? Each of these subjects can serve as ancillary to others. Is it, then, meant to suggest that it is *only* as a handmaid to historical scholarship that International Relations can have a rôle? That would be like saying that it was only as an aid to his biographers that a man's personality could with profit be appraised. How about those who might be offering him a job? The fact that International Relations can justify itself by reference to the historians' dependence on the insights it can give need not mean that these must be utilizable by them, the historians, alone. However, the friends of International Relations may contrive to suffer gladly the imputation that their subject is only as useful, and as independent, as Mathematics.

The passage also sees in Professor Renouvin's volumes abundant testimony to the value of "history properly conceived" as a method by which human society can be studied. And well it may. Who has questioned the potentialities of History in that regard? But it goes, alas, a little further, to cite the Renouvin performance as supporting the belief that "history . . . is the only (sic)" such method: which is just a shade too much like concluding that cocoa is so obviously body-building that no other so-called beverage can be considered fit to drink.

Then, there is the half-truth about scientific method. That for studying "the complexities of human behaviour" it is unsafe to assume that a practice appropriate in some natural sciences is necessarily *a propos*—this can never too often be said. But does the search for "a body of theory applicable to the relations between political communities in abstraction" necessarily depend upon the attempted application of inappropriate



methods borrowed without discrimination from natural science? Surely it is of the essence of scientific method that it have relevance to the material in whose investigation it is to be employed. If, for instance, in Criminology, there should be evolved a method not previously used, or likely ever to be usable, in the "natural" sciences, must this of necessity be decried as *ex hypothesi* unscientific? And is it, as such, the complexities, or is it not rather the unpredictabilities, of human behaviour that render the merely scientific approach so patently insufficient for the full-scale, omnidimensional appreciation—whether in dying past or in living present—of social affairs?

The reviewer, whatever his avocation, can be forgiven much for his warning against the heresy that social studies, if scientific, will be useful, but if not, not. Think of the stored up wisdom on the ways of man the *polis*-builder, that would, by this criterion, be put beyond the student's permitted purview. Consider the issues, central to the understanding of public life, which it would no longer be his to explore. But does a discipline cease to be independent, or academic, if once it develop a philosophic side? Or are we to say that Philosophy itself is other than independent, since it too—though the reviewer forbears to say so—can, like the so-called social sciences, bring to historical scholarship a precious aid?

There is no doubt a sense in which "natural history" may be seen as aptly named. Its reflections on the nature of nature are mostly based on observations brought forward from the past; so many of them having been made as much as a moment, or more, ago. All that now remains of them are memories, or records: and, while, being related to nature, it is natural to call them natural, being tied to the past, it is at any rate not fantastic to call them history too. If "history properly conceived" comprehends all studies rooted in recent observations, it becomes but a mild exaggeration to see it as "the only method by which human society can be studied". For it now becomes identifiable with Sociology, understood in its widest sense; and what, in that sense, is Sociology but the study of human society as such?

One may look forward to seeing what one's pupils, when told to discuss it in an essay, will make of this fascinating passage. How many of them, one wonders, will retain unamended their initial impression—the only impression, very possibly, of the generality of readers—that it looks to be pretty authoritative, and to dispose rather effectively of that stuff about an independent discipline? One is loth to suppose that the reviewer can have relied upon his words not being critically read. But even more does one hesitate to assume that either he or those whose vocation as historians he seems so superfluously concerned to vindicate can find in this his opening paragraph nothing odd.

When reading his review one remembered a great savant remarking, in a broadcast, on how, in our scientific age, the distrustful attitude of many an ordinary man toward religious belief was often no more than a matter of vague intuition, finding no systematically argumentative form. It sometimes seems as if, on the pretensions of International Relations<sup>1</sup> some of those who set the tone in academic milieux may be governed by similarly intuitive doubts—of which they fain would feel more certain than they do. And thus, when prompted to put their misgivings into words, they resort

<sup>1</sup> cf. *Universities Quarterly*, August 1953.

to a language which, while looking pretty trenchant, does little, if considered, to make for clarity of mind. And with this they may all too commonly get away. In the absence—which is what it usually is—of a qualified spokesman for the subject, the footing on which its merits can now be pronounced upon will have been compromised from the start.

The question why in a certain society any given line of study is overvalued, or undervalued, by those who should be in a position to know its worth, is itself a topic for sociological inquiry—which might give some suggestive results. It is, for instance, curious with what apparent indifference some with offspring of their own seem to view the outlook for civilization and, in particular, for western freedom, in the world. One might have thought it would mean something to them whether those of tomorrow were destined to have a worse world or a better than we of today. If, for example, the question were that of combating some terrible disease, is it conceivable that men of responsibility would not favour the following up of every possible avenue to its progressive abatement?

Yet the very individual who over the coffee deplores the simplicity of those who, even at the summit, seem susceptible to the smiles and the wiles and the alternating styles of the acknowledged pastmasters of sociological war, will on the morrow concede no gesture for the endorsement of those endeavours whereby the minds at least of younger men could be disciplined to that vigilance which, if the gate is to be kept, must eternally be there.

It is not as if there were in these times an absence of interest in educational reform. At Bristol the other day, at the British Association, the theme of one discussion-paper was the education of the physicist, still too narrowly specialized, for some. Did anybody allude to the existence, at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, of a Chair of International Relations? From what one saw in the newspapers, nobody at all. Or again, there was Cambridge, in 1953—when, convened from all the corners of the Commonwealth, men of experience and erudition debated the question—What, if we could not have the Classics, would we accept in their place? Mostly the speakers addressed themselves, with a charming disdain for the agenda, to the exaltation of the Classics. It was high-grade conversation, whether pertinent or not. But what, to a believer in International Relations, a subject no one mentioned, was so heartening to notice was the appositeness with which argument after argument for awareness of the Ancient World, could be applied, with minimal modifications, to his studies of today. Has the teacher of the Classics been stamped as superficial, because his teaching takes account as well of History as of Economics, of Geography and Literature as of Law? Or for enjoining on his pupils, and enjoying for himself, the full-bodied appreciation of his field of study as a whole? If the exercise of sharing, through the writings of their philosophers, in the thought-ways of the Greeks, has been a staple of the venerated "Greats" curriculum, it has, in the International Relations programme, its counterpart in some of the more heroic feats of empathy which must be accomplished if the logic of other men's interpretations of the course of things is sufficiently to be understood.

From one who knew whereof he spoke, on his being shown the 'Structure' syllabus, there came the comment: "I had not heard about this. Mostly



philosophy, it seems to me".<sup>1</sup> Was this an objection, or was it a tribute, to the conception reflected in what he had been given to read? Such words, from some, might have come with an adverse implication: but here, as it happened, they could be accepted as praise. And certainly, the remark was at least in this sense true, that, presented by anyone equipped to develop its detail in a worthwhile manner, the teaching of Structure should appeal to what there may be of the philosophical in any thinking man. For it is above all the philosopher who has the disposition and the capacity to uncover the roots of a person's reactions to his experience: and often it is only by probing into their inexplicit premises that access can be had to the source of men's response to some situation of existential choice.

Yet the subject does not figure as Philosophy, or as History, or as Politics either. As a discipline it is distinct from, though owing much to, all of these. It is precisely in owing so much to so many of them that it has its distinctness from each. It is one of those subjects—Industrial Relations, similarly seen, would be another—as would domestic relations, should we ever get around to that—in which to "specialize" is not, in the accepted sense, to become specialized at all. For there are specialists and specialists. It is in social studies as in medicine. What, in medicine, do we find? On the one hand, specialization such as that in disorders of the ear, nose and throat. On the other, a specialization in the ailments of the very young. Though the latter, like the former, can be contrasted with so-called general practice, it too is the affair of a general practitioner. Ear, nose and throat make up part of a man: children part of mankind. The child is not just part of a man. The first sort of specialist studies a limited category of human ills. The second the ills of a category of persons. If International Relations does not take within its competence the whole of life, it does embrace a part of it, and not merely an aspect of a part. It is concerned, holistically, and in all its aspects, with the whole of a part of the life of mankind.

In all its aspects. This is what seems as yet to be less than universally understood. It might have been a geographer, or a psychologist; it might have been an economist: let us suppose it was this last. An economist, let us assume, was heard to complain that International Relations was moving beyond its field. What would be thought of an Economics Department that took to teaching Law—for its bearing upon economic activity? Why then should International Relations include the economic aspects of its subject-matter? Let the shoemaker stick to his last. A shrewd point, this? True: a given situation may raise problems of a legal, and others of an economic, kind; and the one kind the economists can tackle, while leaving to others the other. It may be so. But International Relations deals not simply with isolated aspects of anything, but with situations in their wholeness; and the teacher who would appreciate international life in disregard of its legal, say, or its strategic, or economic components would be rather like a mathematics master discoursing on the properties of a three-sided square. The economic, the legal and the strategic factors are part of the very stuff and substance of an international situation, to be acknowledged, one must

<sup>1</sup> In London, International Relations, at the elementary level, under the name The Structure of International Society, is open to be taken, as an optional subsidiary, as well by students not proposing, as by those proposing, to specialise, in the third year, in International Relations.

hope, as our student's specific concern.

Let the shoemaker stick to his last! Let the International Relations teacher proceed with his subject. Who wants to stop him? Let him have his rights. Only, no Strategics, mind you; no Economics; no Law! This is the voice of Portia. The point of the Shylock story is that any trick of phony argument is good enough to defeat the horrid Jew. Purportedly he is not being impeded. The light for him is green. The flesh is his for the taking. Only, no drop of blood!

The next thing we should be hearing is No Psychology! Wars may begin in the minds of men, but, until they have, what is that to such as we? . . . As well might we expect it of the criminologist that he overlook the economic or the psychological aspects of crime.

For the point is indeed that in studies such as Criminology, and International Relations, which have reference not to a facet, but to a segment, of life, and deal with reality in the concrete, not with a systematically segregated aspect of anything, the fact that the subjects of Economics and Psychology and Geography come in as such advantageous underpinners does nothing to absolve the student from seeing the geographical, strategic and other such elements as forming, so to say, the warp and woof of the pattern which it is his to construe. Whereas, to Economics or to International Law, International Relations may be an advantageous underpinner and nothing more.

How advantageous, not all of them may as yet have come to see. That is what makes it so congenial, and so right, to pay here a tribute to the teachers of Political Science. With the exception, in some centres, of the historians, and in others, of the sociologists—not to mention cases where International Relations were cared for in the first instance by an inter-departmental committee or, as in London, seen as fit to form a subject of their own—they, the political scientists, were in many an American college the first to discover their students' need of systematic teaching on the relationships of people *inter se*: for, if they were to study government at all, it surely must include the policy-making process; and how could policy be appreciated if not as a single system, inclusive as well of its external as of its internal manifestations? Hence their creation, here and there, within their departments of Politics, of posts—subordinate, it is true, but posts all the same—for the teaching, as Political Science, of International Relations, under that very title; it is greatly to their glory that, just as History departments had been the nurseries, in so many centres, of an infant Political Science, so did departments of Political Science, in these other instances, become the cradles of a form of International Relations, bearing traits evidential of its place of birth.

But if all this must be seen as such a credit to the "politicians", what seems less obviously so has been the what-we-have-we-hold position (call it not "imperialism", in many mouths a nasty word) of those who have looked with ill-favour on the teaching of International Relations, by that very title, on the budget of departments other than their own. A mere live-and-let-live attitude would be unbecoming enough, since it is for mutual support, and the consolidating of the ties of interdependence between equals that the twin disciplines of Government, on the one hand, and of International Relations, on the other, would seem to call. What then is one to say of the philosophy of tooth and claw, and those uses of



the eyebrow in which it may find expression—plays scarcely less insidious than those latter-day techniques of character-assassination to which they are akin? For teaching arrangements may be mortal, no less than those who teach. The administrative cold-warfare conducted against a subject regarded as redundant is not a private fight. Anybody can join in, whether fully informed or not aent the development with respect to which—albeit in perfect good part—he deems it his public duty as opportunity offers to manifest mistrust. A sample of the sort of thing may be cited from an exaltedly impersonal source. “A study of International Relations”, declares a UNESCO *rapporteur*, “which is not based on a solid foundation of political science can scarcely be said to have a firm basis of any kind”, which being so, the teaching of International Relations “within departments of political science” is “in our opinion” the (sic) “correct solution”.<sup>1</sup>

It is true of course that under the label of International Relations there well may persist forms of teaching which had better not have been begun. But it does not therefore follow that there can be only one method having merits of its own. No type of teaching can with decorum seek to corner for itself the use of its name. Let one form or another be circumscribed, sabotaged, stymied, and guided up the garden, if revealed by honest inquiry as noxious in itself. But let no one affirm *a priori*, in the fashion of a pre-empiricistic, medieval, dogmatism, that there can in the very nature of things be but a single formula for handling the facts of international coexistence in an academically reputable way. What, one might ask, about the London arrangement, whereby nobody can specialize, at Part II of the B.Sc.(Econ.), in International Relations who has not, like everyone else, satisfied the examiners in Part I, with its compulsory papers in Government, in Political History, and in the History of Political Ideas? Is it to be supposed that those who have made the grade in these subjects are nevertheless without that firm foundation on which they may properly proceed to the specialism of their choice? The question surely is not in what department a subject is taught, but in what manner—and in the context of what educational scheme.

If International Relations is of necessity to be taught as if it were simply a “side-branch” of something else, why should this something be Politics rather than Geography, or History, or Economics, or even International Law—since these too are such obviously advantageous underpinners, for want of which it might be argued that the teaching must lack a firm foundation? The truth is that, on the reasoning against which one is protesting, the social sciences, all the lot of them, should be herded together and bundled into the philosophic fold. For where, save within a department of Philosophy, can firm foundations be laid for the teaching, for example, of Political Science?

What is valuable, however, in the remark of the UNESCO *rapporteur* is the spotlight which it casts upon our subject's need of underpinners as such. To cover them systematically at the outset would for the student be a counsel of perfection. So much the more important, then, for the teacher to be on terms with them all. Thus the crux of the matter lies not in the subject's difficulty for the student, but in its toughness for the teacher,

<sup>1</sup> UNESCO, “Teaching of the Social Sciences”, *Political Science*, pp. 61–66.

and, while not conceding that this problem is therefore beyond solution, one admits that it has yet to be solved.

“Take twelve eggs . . .” So began a widely relished distortion of an official recipe, in days when on the wartime breakfast table the eggs were so few and far between. For eggs read eggheads, and you have the groundwork for a formula for the building of an International Relations teaching-team. The recipe had also something about “cream” in it; and, alas, the world has never enough of that. But we do not judge the importance of medicine, or of soldiering, or of sanitation, by the quality of the doctors, the generals, or the sanitary inspectors available in a given country at a given time. The vicious circle can be eliminated only by degrees. We do not shoot the organist if, while his successor is still under training, he does his modest best. The case here is not that International Relations teaching, as hitherto achieved, is so obviously a “good thing”; but how much better a thing it could be, and what a good thing it would be if it were.

Paradoxically enough, the most decisive argument, almost, when one sees it, for the fitting in of Structure, is that undesignedly offered by the man—no rarity, by any means—who, with superior intelligence, questions its use. For this he could hardly do were he himself not wandering—for all his excellent education—in the twilight of early infancy where the composition of his cosmos is concerned. It is the presence of such lessons in the limitations of the inherited system that proves the very need which they complacently deny. So far are they from seeing the sense of Structure that they do not even prescribe it for their neighbour.

It is still perhaps a bit too early, when, as an optional subsidiary in London, the Structure subject has been running for a mere six years, to speak of its established value. That good men, having taken it, have thereafter done relatively well is no proof that, without it, they might not have done relatively better. But it does rather suggest that it has operated as no impediment to their doing relatively well. And in fact, for those who care to do so, it is possible to divine that the results, to date, are good. Roll on the time when, among the advertised qualifications for employment in the teaching of Structure, it may be desired of a man that he himself shall have done it in his youth. Then, indeed, it should be possible to see.

When, on the morrow of World War One, Mr. David Davies (as then he was) endowed at Aberystwyth the Woodrow Wilson Professorship, it is plausible to infer that he saw himself as blazing a trail. Had it been his thought to found a Chair of History, even of International History, or of Government, he would doubtless have made his intention unmistakable. What in fact he provided for was a teaching of International Politics. And this, one might assume, would be distinguishable, because distinct, from politics-just-like-that. It was possible—and the President's name might remind one of it—to be a veteran in politics domestically, as well as academically, while in international politics little better than a babe. There was, in short, room in the world for men with richer insight into the forces and the processes which shaped the life of nations in their relations *inter se*. There was a subject-matter—those relationships—which cried out for study on its own.

Lord Davies (as he later became) was admittedly a man of affairs, who, not in the universities only but in the world, wanted results to come about. He had views on how things ought to be. Does this, however, suggest that



he would not have been in favour of an objective presentation, by his professor, of things as they were? Would he be certain to have protested that the existing structure of society must only be transcended and forgotten, not considered as it stood?

To illuminate the existing diplomatic setup is not at all to bar inquiry into possible steps towards its amendment for the better. It is merely to exemplify in a given connection the bearing of the principle that if you want to build a house you had better begin with a study of the site. The problem of providing a worthier dwelling-place for man to inhabit is not merely that of putting up a pattern for an ideal home. The blueprinting of utopias is no more apropos in the teaching of International Relations than in that of Economics—less so, indeed, when you think of it: for has not Economics, traditionally, been ever a little wistful about what might happen if folks would but be sensible and permit the realization of a perfect state of economic health? International Relations is not just a time-absorbing discourse on the difference it would make if men, and states, and statesmen were righteous, rational and wise. It is a study of that world society which we know, and have to live in; and those who are to seek the truth of it will have a heavy job.

As we have to live in it. To a Scandinavian audience not long ago the writer found occasion to say:

"We are apparently in for a period in which everything is going to depend, not so much upon the problem of war, as upon the problem of peace that may lead up to it. It is the problem of peace, of coexistence, of social living. We have not yet, even in any merely local community, found for this problem an ideal solution. . . . But it is becoming more urgent than ever that the best minds—not necessarily of my, ageing, generation, but of the generation now coming along—should include some whose attention will turn to this great problem, of social living on the planetary level, in 'the society of states'."

With those words the pioneer, Lord Davies, might presumably have agreed.

*October 1955.*

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